

## FAQs

### *Frequently Asked Questions Nevada's School Lunch Program*

#### **What is the National School Lunch Program?**

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman signed the National School Lunch Act, which created the National School Lunch Program. Today, this program feeds more than 31 million students nationwide. In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was signed into law by President Obama. It has marked the first major update to the National School Lunch Program guidelines in 15 years. New rules aim to boost the nutrition of school meals. Public or non-profit private schools, as well as non-profit or non-profit private residential child care institutions may participate in the school lunch program. Schools that choose to take part in the program receive federal cash subsidies and USDA foods for each meal they serve. In order to receive the federal subsidies and foods, the participating schools must meet federal nutrition requirements and offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible children.

#### **What is the Nevada Department of Agriculture's role?**

The Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) provides education and outreach focused on meeting required national school lunch standards. Training and technical assistance is provided for sponsors of the program, which helps prepare school staff to create nutritious meals, and educate children on making healthy choices.

#### **Who qualifies for free or reduced price meals?**

Any child attending a participating school may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch Program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Children from families between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced priced meals, for which these students can be charged no more than 40 cents



per meal. Current data show that 130 percent of the poverty level is \$30,615 for a family of four; 185 percent is \$43,568.

#### **Can I provide my children with their own lunch?**

Yes. School lunches are optional. There is, however, some evidence that shows that school lunches can be more nutritious than lunches brought from home. School lunches provide fruits, vegetables and whole grain rich foods every day and can help busy families provide children with nutritious meals.

#### **What do schools receive?**

A majority of the support provided by the USDA to schools participating in the National School Lunch Program comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each meal served. School districts that adopt the updated meal requirements will receive an additional six cents of federal cash reimbursement for each meal served, adjusted for inflation in subsequent years. Higher reimbursement rates

#### **Contact**

##### **Food and Nutrition Division**

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are also in effect for schools with high percentages of low-income students. Schools are also entitled by law to receive USDA Foods. States select entitlement foods for their schools from a list of foods purchased by USDA and offered through the school lunch program. Schools can also receive “bonus” USDA foods as they are available from surplus agricultural stocks. Bonus foods are offered as they become available through agricultural surplus.

### What are the components of the new meal pattern?

The meal pattern nutrition standards are based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Decisions about which foods to serve and how they are prepared are made by local school food personnel. New food options include:

1. **Fruits:** School meals can include all types of fruit including fresh fruit, 100-percent fruit juice, frozen fruit, dried fruit (without added sugar) and canned fruit that is packed in light syrup or 100% juice.
2. **Vegetables:** School meals are now required to include a variety of vegetables throughout the week. This includes dark-green vegetables such as broccoli and romaine lettuce, red/orange vegetables such as carrots, starchy vegetables such as potatoes and beans and legumes such as black and pinto beans.
3. **Milk:** School meals must include non-fat plain or flavored milk—or 1% plain milk—and at least two varieties of milk must be offered.
4. **Grains:** All grains offered in school meals must now be whole grain rich, increasing the amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals in school meals. There are many great whole grain offerings on school trays such as whole grain bread, whole grain pasta and whole grain tortillas.
5. **Meat / Meat Alternates:** A variety of meats or meat alternates can be offered in school meals, including

beef, pork and chicken—or vegetarian offerings such as yogurt, peanut butter, cheese and beans.

6. **Portions:** Students must choose three different food items from the five food groups in order for schools to receive federal reimbursements for school lunches. At least one choice must be a fruit or vegetable.

### I’m still concerned about the quality of my child’s food at school. What can I do?

NDA encourages school districts to adopt the national school meal pattern in order to be a part of the school lunch program. Above that, NDA encourages schools to serve the highest quality of foods to students, and NDA provides training to school food service professionals on best practices. Concerned parents can contact their school district’s nutrition department with any concerns.

### What is plate waste? What are schools doing to manage it?

Plate waste is the amount of edible food served to students that is uneaten. Reducing plate waste is a priority for the USDA, and a recent study by Harvard School of Public Health showed that the National School Lunch Program overall did not result in increased food waste. Neither USDA or NDA mandate that certain foods can or cannot be served, and menu choices are at the discretion of school district personnel. However, NDA encourages healthy choices and to help make those choices available to students. Strategies such as rescheduling lunch so that it follows recess and increasing food quality have also been effective in reducing plate waste. We have resources available on our website about healthy eating in the school environment. Find out more here: [http://nutrition.nv.gov/Programs/National\\_School\\_Lunch\\_Program\\_\(NSLP\)/](http://nutrition.nv.gov/Programs/National_School_Lunch_Program_(NSLP)/).

**SMARTER LUNCHROOM STRATEGIES,** such as how foods are named and where they are placed in the cafeteria, can facilitate healthy choices and increase fruit and vegetable consumption by **UP TO 70%**

The infographic features a grid of food icons: bananas, strawberries, orange slices, watermelon slices, blueberries, a whole loaf of bread, broccoli, hard-boiled eggs, red chili peppers, milk cartons, carrots, and green peas.

### SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE WITH INNOVATIVE NEW STRATEGIES, SUCH AS:

- Allowing students to keep a lunch or breakfast food item for consumption later in the school day
- Using techniques listed on the **Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Score Card** to help reduce food waste
- Setting up a table for kids to place items they are not going to consume (packaged or pre-portioned items)
- Letting kids self-serve
- Composting food waste for school gardens
- Collaborating with local farmers on composting or food-scrap projects
- Collecting excess wholesome food after mealtimes to donate to charitable organizations
- Sign up for the **U.S. Food Waste Challenge** to share your story on how you are reducing, recovering, or recycling food waste